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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

CLASSICAL ART

ARCHAIC ROOM

SCULPTURES AND BRONZES

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CLASSICAL ART

Archaic Room: sculptures
and bronzes

Department of Classical Art
Gallery Guide no. 1

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CLASSICAL ART.

Archaic Room.

Sculpture.

Sculpture, the most technically difficult of the manual arts, was one of the last to be revived in Greece during the period of renewed social and political stability which followed the unsettled centuries of Dorian migration. A few monuments had perhaps survived from the Mycenaean age to serve as models, but the chief incentive, as well as a knowledge of tools and methods, came from Egypt and from the East. Although Greek sculpture, like that of the countries from which it derived its greatest aid, was devoted chiefly to the service of religion, the originality of the Greek genius could not long be confined within the narrow limits of traditional religious convention which had prevented the free development of Oriental plastic art. Throughout the Archaic period, from about 600 to 500 B. C., successive attempts to secure individuality of expression for ideas of increasing complexity and interest reveal a growing skill and power which culminate in the supreme creations of the fifth century B. C.

In Archaic Greek sculpture the female form is always draped, the male nude; the standing type is the most common, posed in a strictly frontal attitude, like Egyptian statues, with the left foot generally advanced a little and with the arms hanging down close to the sides, or with one arm bent at the elbow and the hand extended holding an attribute. The universal training of Greek youths in gymnasia and the athletic contests at national and local festivals in honor of the gods offered unrivalled opportunities for studying the nude male figure, which Greek sculptors, unimpeded by Oriental prejudice, were at liberty to reproduce.

Certain conventions, due to imperfect mastery of technique, mark the works of the sixth century B. C.; the hair is treated decoratively, falling in a solid mass behind and at each side of the neck, and arranged in spiral curls over the forehead; the ears are unnaturally large and incorrectly placed, the eyes almond-shaped and protruding; and the mouth usually raised at the corners in an attempt to give animation to the expression of the face.

Reliefs and figures in the round were used in the adornment of buildingd, especially of temples, as grave monuments and as memorials of both public and private events. The addition of color, applied to the background of reliefs and to the hair and garments of figures, was of advantage in making architectural sculpture readily visible, in concealing the imperfections

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of inferior material and sometimes even in supplying essential details not worked out by means of the chisel.

Reliefs from the temple of Apollo at Assos, Asia Minor.

(West wall). Trachite. Sixth century B. C.

At the left, two recumbent winged Sphinxes facing one another; between them is a slender column with a rudimentary Ionic capital on the top of which each Sphinx rests one forepaw. The heads are of a pronounced archaic type with receding forehead, prominent nose, small rounded chin, smiling mouth, and eye shown in full front although the face is in profile.

At the right, Herakles, with his bow, pursuing the Centaurs of Mt. Pholoe. Behind Herakles, the Centaur Pholos, holding a wine-cup, raises one hand in a gesture of astonishment, as he watches the flight of the wild Centaurs who had been attracted to his cave by the scent of the wine which he was offering to his guest. The Centaurs are bearded and have human forelegs.

These slabs, together with others preserved in the Louvre and at Constantinople, are from the architrave of the Doric temple of Apollo at Assos, in Asia Minor. This is the only Doric structure known to have had a decorated frieze immediately above the columns of the colonnade. The character of the architecture and the very archaic style of the reliefs indicate a date early in the sixth century B. C. The material is trachite, the volcanic rock of which the acropolis at Assos is composed.

Seated lion. Grave monument from Perachora, near Corinth. Limestone.
(South wall). Sixth century B. C.

During the sixth century B. C. representations of bulls, lions, dogs and other animals were often placed over graves in the belief that they guarded the tomb; reference to the name or character or to an incident in the life of the deceased sometimes appears in later centuries to have been united with the earlier apotropaic signicifance.

This figure of a seated lion is characteristic of the archaic period. when this animal was known to the Greeks only through the medium of Oriental art. The combination of a front view of the head with a side view of the body, the symmetrical arrangement of the flame-like locks of the mane, and the curious pattern formed by the hair along the haunches, resembling a guilloche (braid), indicate that the sculptor sought a striking decorative effect rather than a realistic presentation inspired by a study of the living subject.

Head of a girl. From Sikyon. Limestone. Sixth century B. C. (South wall).

Although carved from a coarser material, this head, broken from a statue, has much of the charm of delicate workmanship and of the refinement in details which make the archaic marble figures of the "Maidens" found on the Acropolis at Athens so attractive. The small oval face, the narrow slanting eyes, thin nose, prominent cheek-bones and crescent smile are characteristic of a time when Ionian ideas controlled the artistic expression of Greece. The conventional treatment of the hair, which is bound with a flat fillet and arranged in parallel locks ending in small curls on the forehead, is unusually pleasing. Traces of red pigment are visible on the hair and lips, and of blue on the ear-studs. (Compare the circular gold ear-studs in the Fifth Century Room, Case 5, section 5, lower righthand corner).

Statue of a man. Limestone. Sixth century B. C. (South wall). Lent by Dr. Denman W. Ross.

Male standing figures of the archaic period usually have both arms hanging stiffly down close to each side of the body (compare the marble statuette from Naukratis in the wall case nearby); the right arm of this figure, however, was bent at the elbow, in the manner of the "Maidens" of the Acropolis at Athens, and the extended hand probably held some attribute. The schematic rendering of the hair, the broad shoulders and slender waist, and the slight advance of the left leg are typical of this class of archaic statues. The carving of the mouth and of the cheeks, fringed by the short beard, gives the face an air of individuality almost suggestive of portraiture.

Male statuette. From Naukratis. Alabaster. Sixth century B. C. (Case on south wall).

This statuette, found on the site of the Greek colony of Naukratis established about the middle of the seventh century B. C. in the Delta of the Nile, illustrates on a small scale the chief characteristics of the so-called archaic "Apollo" type. Most of these nude male figures are statues of athletes dedicated in sanctuaries or erected as monuments over graves, but some of them undoubtedly were intended to personify the god Apollo, even when no distinguishing attribute was added.

Head of a statuette. From Naukratis. Alabaster. Sixth century B. C.

Although broken from another statuette of better workmanship, this head serves to supplement the incomplete "Apollo" figure exhibited beside it. The hair falling in a heavy mass at the back of the head, the oval outline of the face, the large ears incorrectly placed, the prominent, slanting eyes and the mouth slightly curved are distinctively archaic in style. The eyes are outlined in black and there are traces of dark pigment in the hair.

Female face. Marble. Early fifth century B. C.

This is a fragment of a head which has been split in two, just in front of the ears. The forehead and nose are badly broken. The top of the head is a finished surface rising to a low peak, indicating that another piece of marble, probably a helmet, was originally attached above. The figure undoubtedly represented Athena. The work is more advanced in style than the head of a girl from Sikyon (shown in a separate case at the right), and may be assigned to the period between 500 and 480 B. C.

Head of a youth, broken from a statuette. Limestone. Sixth century B. C.

Above the forehead the heavy mass of hair ends in a series of waves; the eyes are nearly on the same plane as the brow; the nose is long, large and straight; the mouth has the archaic smile strongly marked.

Fragment of a marble lamp. Sixth century B. C.

A ram's head with details carved in low relief forms the nozzle of the lamp; on the side, two winged Oriental griffins face one another. (Compare the gold griffin's heads from Rhodes, exhibited in the Fifth Century Room, Case 4, section 3). At each side of the nozzle is an astragal (bead and reel) design; round the rim an egg and dart moulding.

Grave stele. From the Troad, Asia Minor. Marble. Sixth century B. C.
(On the east wall, beside the doorway).

Such slender stone slabs, often decorated with painting or low relief and crowned with delicate ornament, were the usual tyle of grave monument toward the end of the sixth century B. C. To form the akroterion which crowns this stele scrolls, a lotus flower and a palmette are combined in a

graceful composition highly characteristic of Ionic art.

Bronzes.

The introduction of bronze early in prehistoric times among the inhabitants of the islands and coast lands of the Aegean Sea marked a great advance in civilization. In antiquity this metal was far more generally used than it is in modern days, not only for decorative purposes, but in making armor, weapons, implements, household utensils and furniture. Many objects of bronze not primarily intended for ornaments are beautiful in shape and are adorned with repousse, chiselled relief and line engraving. The development of bronze working is parallel to that in other fields of Greek art, advancing from the archaic limitations of an imperfect technique to a complete mastery of tools, processes and material.

Case 5 (on the north wall, beside the doorway).

The objects in this case date from the Geometric and Archaic Periods, - from the eighth to the end of the sixth century B. C.

Top shelf.

Two vertical handles (fastened to the back of the case). Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

Although similar these handles are not identical in design. The thin walled bronze pitchers to which they were originally attached have disintegrated, but the solidly cast handles themselves have withstood decay. (Compare two bronze pitchers in the Fifth Century Room, Case 1, top shelf). Two lions lie outstretched at the top of each handle where it joined the lip of the pitcher; at the bottom lie two rams with shaggy fleece; below them depends a grinning mask of Medusa. Details are rendered by a free use of engraved lines. The rams may be compared with those carried by Hermes (two bronze statuettes in Case 4, centre of room). The palmette ornament springing from volutes on the upper part of each handle resembles the top of the marble grave stele from Asia Minor exhibited on the east wall beside the doorway.

Ornament. Archaic Etruscan. Sixth century B. C.

A youth seizing a rearing horse. The group was once attached to some object, possibly to a helmet.

Statuette. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

Herakles drawing his bow as he runs forward. Originally attached to some object. Compare the figure of Herakles pursuing Centaurs on the relief from Assos, exhibited on the west wall of this room.

Statuette. Archaic Greek. Seventh century B. C.

Apollo. Two hexameters reminiscent of Homer inscribed on front of the thighs in the archaic Boeotian Greek dialect help to determine the date of this unique figure, which is one of the earliest extant Greek bronze statuettes.

"Mantiklos dedicated me from his time to the Far-darter of the silver bow; do thou Phoebus, give gracious resompense." Out of his share of booty in war Mantiklos dedicated this image of Apollo in the sanctuary of the god near Thebes, where the statuette was found. The primitive appearance of the figure with its triangular head and torso, long neck and wasp-like waist recalls the forms of men painted on geometric vases of the eighth century B. C. (Compare the "Dipylon" amphora at west end of room). A bow was probably held in the left hand; the eyes were of ivory or paste inserted.

Ornament. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

Winged Medusa in the archaic running or flying attitude, on an Ionic volute.

Second shelf.

Head of a youth. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

This head, broken from a small statue, was found at Sparta; it dates from the first half of the sixth century B. C., and is the oldest example of Greek hollow casting known to exist. The protruding almond-shaped eyes and the large ears are unsymmetrically placed like those of the archaic limestone figure at the south side of this room; there is here also the appearance of a smile, which results from a naive attempt on the part of early sculptors to give animation to the faces of their statues. The top of the head is smooth and once had some covering, probably a helmet, fastened on with four bronze nails, one of which remains in place above the forehead.

Statuette. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

A youth, once mounted on a horse; the bridle reins were separate pieces of metal and passed through the holes pierced in the closed hands. The rider wears a short tunic, belted at the waist. There is a fillet about his head and his hair falling in a broad banded mass down his back ends in a V-shaped point.

Votive offering. Archaic Greek. Geometric style. Seventh century B. C.

A deer suckling a fawn; on the back of the deer perches a bird. On the animals is a geometric design of incised circles, each with a dot in the centre; on the under side of the base a maeander pattern.

Handle of a pitcher. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C. From Sparta.

A nude youth bending backward grasps the tails of two lions which lie at either side of his head; his feet once rested on a palmette above which on each side reclined a ram, as may be seen by comparison with a similar handle in the centre of the shelf below. Bodily forms are admirably rendered, and the attitude of the figure is skilfully adapted to the practical purpose which it served. This is one of the finest archaic bronzes in the collection.

Ornament. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

A winged griffin, walking.

Third shelf.

Statuette. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

A youth mounted on a galloping horse. He wears a hat (petasos), and a closely fitting tunic. A hole in his left hand and another through the muzzle of the

horse were for the attachment of reins. As usual there is no saddle. The idea of speed is admirably portrayed.

Votive bull. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

An inscription on the side of the bull states that Homoloichos dedicated it to the child of the Kabeiros. (Vases from the sanctuary of these divinities, near Thebes in Boeotia, are exhibited in the Second Vase Room, on the ground floor, Case 15, top shelf). Small figures of animals made of bronze, of terra-cotta, and of other materials, were dedicated at shrines in great abundance, to symbolize, perhaps, the more costly gift of an actual animal for sacrifice which only the richer worshippers could offer.

Handle of a pitcher. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

The handle is similar to the one on the shelf above; it is entire and shows the graceful curve of the bent body of the youth.

Ornament. Oriental or Early Greek.

A seated lion. The figure was made for attachment.

Bronze goat. Archaic Greek or Etruscan. Sixth century B. C.

Cast hollow.

Bottom shelf.

Two fibulae (safty pins). Early Greek.

For fastening the type of dress worn in antiquity pins were indispensible, varying in size according to the weight and texture of the cloth in which they were used. From the many examples which have been preserved the development of fibulae can be traced from the end of the Mycenaean Age through the Geometric, Archaic and Classical Greek Periods to late Roman and succeeding times. Fibulae are made of bronze and of precious metals (see two gold specimens in the Late Greek Room, Case 7, Sec. 4), and can be approximately dated from their shape and from the character of their decoration, which corresponds with contemporary vase-painting and relief work.

On the flat clasp-shield of the larger of the two fibulae here shown are engraved a pattern of zigzag lines and an aquatic bird such as appear on vases of geometric style dating from the eighth and seventh centuries B. C.

The arc of the fibula is like a shallow boat, and the shaft, as on modern safty-pins, is given spring by the triple coil which forms the hinge.

The smaller pin is made of a single piece of rectangular wire twisted in two flat spirals connected by a double loop. Such pins were in use during the sixth and fifth centuries B. C.

Dagger and sheath. Early Greek. Eighth or seventh century B. C.

The dagger is intact save for the loss of the inlaid wood or bone which completed the hilt. On the blade are engraved lines parallel to the edges. The front of the sheath is decorated with an incised geometric zigzag pattern and a maeander; the sheath terminates in a spherical knob.

Handle. Early Greek. Seventh or sixth century B. C.

The handle is thin and flat, and has incised upon it a figure of Artemis drawing an arrow from her quiver. The lines are filled with a white substance to make the design more prominent.

Case 4 (centre of room).

The five small bronzes in this case are remarkable for unusual excellence of technique and of preservation; they illustrate the development of Greek plastic art during the second half of the sixth century B. C., and show the archaic conventions in representing human figures which characterize marble sculpture of the same period. They were cast solid, and details were subsequently indicated on the surface by delicately incised lines.

Two statuettes of Hermes carrying a ram. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

These statuettes from the Peloponnesus where Hermes was worshipped as the protector of flocks, were probably votive gifts of shepherds at shrines of the god. The two figures are similar, except in size and in minor points of dress and of the arrangement of the hair. Each is bearded and stands facing full front, with the left foot slightly advanced; originally each carried a herald's wand (caduceus, kerykeion) in his right hand. The costume consists of a short, neatly fitting tunic girded about the waist, of a round, pointed hat with narrow brim (the pilos, which Hermes often wears), and of high boots. The beauty of the work is increased by the careful engraving of details;

the decorative treatment of the hair is especially noteworthy. These figures "belong among the best examples of archaic art that we possess".

Athlete. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

This statuette of an athlete, found at Olympia, recalls the influence exerted by the athletic games of Greece on the art of sculpture. Victorious athletes were honored with statues, and sculptors were free to reproduce the entire human figure; a liberty which was not allowed in Oriental art. Games and the continual athletic practice which played so large a part in the education of Greek youth, gave sculptors many opportunities to observe the nude, male human form and to raise their standards of representing it.

Like the more archaic marble statuettes from Naukratis (in a small case on the south wall) and like the limestone statue of an athlete exhibited in this room (centre of south wall), this figure stands erect, facing straight ahead, with both feet planted firmly, the left foot a little in advance. The broad chest, the narrow waist and the well developed muscles of the legs suggest vigor and agility. The statuette was probably the votive gift of an athlete in a sacred precinct of Zeus at Olympia, and the lost objects which were originally held in the closed hands doubtless indicated the nature of the contest in which the dedicator was about to participate.

Artemis. Archaic Greek. Sixth century B. C.

Until the fourth century B. C. figures of women in Greek art are draped, and thus present a direct contrast to the nude male, athletic type. This statuette of Artemis from Elis wears the severe and simple Doric dress, which consists of a single garment without sleeves, pinned on the shoulder and girdled at the waist, and having a short over-fold covering the breast. The costume is completed by sandals, a wreath and a necklace with a pendant. An inscription

incised on the front of the skirt tells that a certain Chimaridas offered it to Artemis Daedalia, and the identity of the goddess is also indicated by the lower half of a bow which still remains in his left hand. The right hand may have held an arrow. In its rigid, frontal pose and in the pillar-like form of the figure below the waist, this statuette resembles primitive cult images, and probably reproduces on a small scale some earlier statue of the goddess.

Aphrodite. Archaic Greek. End of the sixth century B. C.

The concious grace and fondness for elaboration of details which characterize Ionic art, are reflected in this representation of Aphrodite which once appropriately served to support a circular, polished, bronze mirror. The goddess wears soft boots, a dress of thin material made with sleeves in the Ionian fashion, and over it a heavier mantle fastened with a brooch on the right shoulder and draped in graceful, zigzag folds. She lifts one edge of the mantle daintily with her left hand, and in her right hand, holds out a flower. Her hair is parted in the middle and arranged in loops over the temples; it is confined by a diadem and, loosely tied again, falls to the waist. The hovering Erotes (Cupids), in the archaic flying attitude, direct attention to the face of the goddess. The little figures are so placed that the support of the mirror appears to be gradually broadeden at the top in order to carry the weight more easily. The work is modelled with great delicacy and precision, and the details of dress and hair are very finely engraved.

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